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December 11, 1965

Senator Joseph Tydings
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senator Tydings,

Your approach to the Viet Nam problem on the Sherer-MacNeil Report on NBC TV tonight, is aimed in the right direction. Brief as is your suggestion, "negotiations based on the Geneva Accord", it is yet verbose, and it recommends a course of action that cannot succeed, that morally and legally ought not succeed, and that can and will lead only to further frustrations and worse.

There were negotiations. They resulted in the Geneva Accord. What we need now, and what alone can succeed, is immediate, complete and unequivocal implementation of that agreement that our country solemnly pledged itself to honor. Had our government won a war, signed and honored an agreement ending that war, and then, ten or twelve years later, been confronted with the demand, under implemented threats, that we renegotiate that agreement in favor of our attackers, would it survive? What would we as a people think and do about this? Certainly, the least that can be said is that we would not tolerate it. I do not think we have ever had a government which would have given serious thought to such a proposal, either. Why then, should we expect less of others? Indeed, why should we demand it, implying at the same time that this is an act of grace, a major concession on our part.

Why are we so totally alone in this hideous venture, save for the token contributions of a few of our mendicants, for which we in any event pay many times over? Precisely because what we demand is not acceptable, to those we have made our enemies and more, to the rest of the world, especially those who are and want to be our friends.

There is no possibility of a solution in the terms the government offers. The worst thing that could happen to us in Viet Nam is that we succeed in the military venture we have undertaken. It is infinitely worse than a military failure, for if we succeed, we are in immeasurably worse shape, in Viet Nam, at home and in the rest of the world, than if we "succeed". Also, I believe the world is long past the point where it will regard might and right. Today only what is right can be regarded as right, and what is wrong cannot and must not be regarded as right, nor should our or any other government demand of its people or the rest of the world that wrong be considered right.

If there is to be a solution in Viet Nam, and I believe we above all people need this solution most and fastest, it can be achieved only on the basis of what is right. What is in this context right is clear, despite the obfuscations of our government. It is that all the governments signatory to the Geneva Accord or who in other ways bound themselves to abide by it, do just that, and immediately.

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There is no doubt that we have plunged into a quicksand and that every forceful struggle to escape it is a fight against the odds. The problem is to get out - not to get out with our pants down or our little straight, but to get out alive. Little is to be gained by casting imprecations over the grave of John Foster Dulles, the false prophet who led us into this quagmire, for the same problem would still confront us: we must get out of it.

Then the only question is how, and the only answer is however possible. Fortunately, despite all errors and faults, we live in a world that you, as a lawyer, I believe will acknowledge, regards right and justice as the most important things. If we take the lead in seeking a solution that is right and just, regardless of how it may seem to those whose greatest concern is with what they consider "image" or "face" - and such people exist all over the world and in all countries - we can only benefit from it, both now and in the future. And we will again have won what clearly we have now lost, the respect of the rest of the world.

So I come to the verbosity in your suggestion. It is the word "negotiations". If you propose, and more important, if our government proposes, the immediate implementation of the Geneva Accord, we are on the firmest possible ground. We are out of the quicksand. We have a solution that will work and must, for the rest of the world will eventually enforce it if any of the parties refuse to.

Whether or not this agreement was wise is today not an issue. I happen to believe it was a sound solution. It is the solution that was agreed to and that all the parties are bound to abide by.

If our government proposes this solution, will it in any way suffer? Will it or any people surrender or lose anything of value or importance? I think not, and only those Neanderthal mentalities who we have followed despite their clear record of consistent failure and always being wrong will object to it. They will do so because they want what is wrong, what they should not want. Such projects must fail if the world and its people are to thrive and live in peace. Only right must succeed. There is no other basis for life in today's world.

I do believe that if our government calls for the immediate and unconditional implementation of the Geneva Accord, its call will be a clarion to the world and it will be honored both abroad and at home. This will not be regarded as a defeat, but as a victory, and it will, indeed be a victory, for whether we are today or have in the past been right or wrong, the public acknowledgement of what is right will earn everyone's respect and admiration.

More important, it is the need of the world, and it is the only possible way in which this most crucial of today's problems can be met and solved. Remember, too, that the Cuban Missile Crisis was immediately followed by the limited test-ban treaty.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Weisberg